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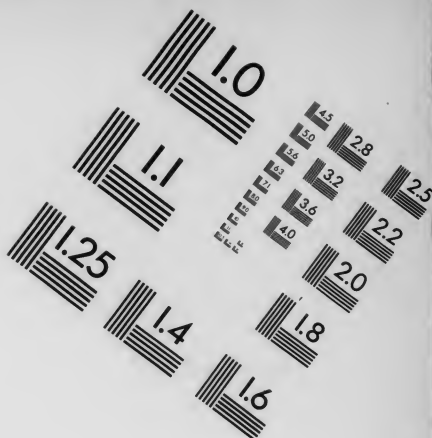
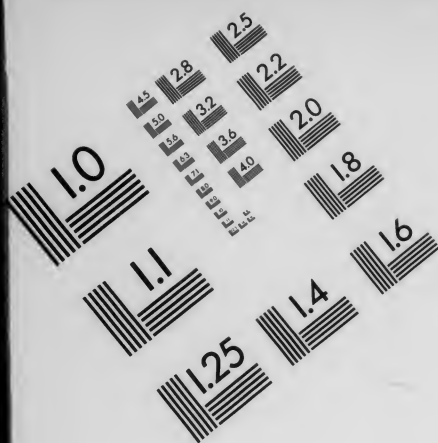
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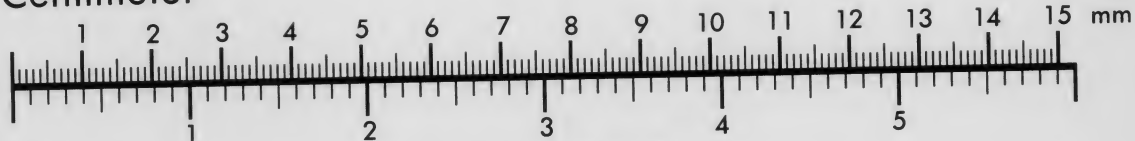
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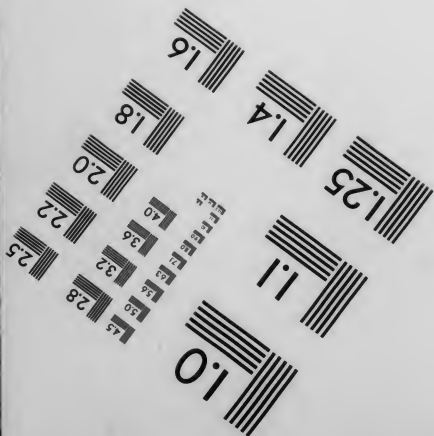
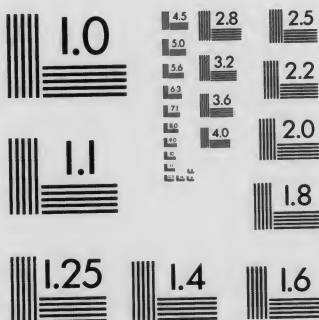
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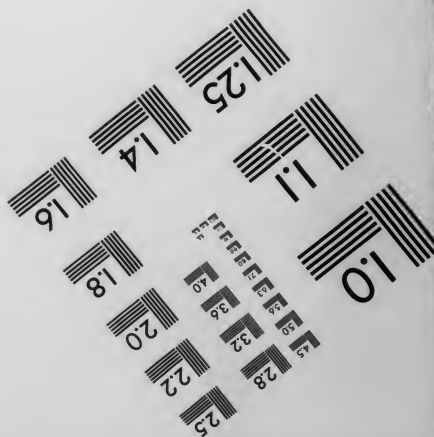
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THE  
Apparent Contradictions of the Sacred Scriptures  
RECONCILED.

BY THE REV. CHAUNCEY GILES.



The Lord is gracious, and full of compassion; slow to anger, and of great mercy. The Lord is good to all: and His tender mercies are over all His works. (Ps. cxlv. 8, 9.)

God is jealous, and the Lord revengeth; the Lord revengeth, and is furious; the Lord will take vengeance on His adversaries, and He reserveth wrath for His enemies. (Nahum i. 2.)

THESE words form an example of a large number of passages in the Sacred Scriptures which seem to contradict each other, and in which the Lord is represented as possessing entirely opposite characters, and as doing, at one time, what at another He declares He cannot and will not do. These contradictions in the letter of the Bible have always furnished its enemies with a powerful argument against its Divine character and authenticity, have caused its friends many difficulties, and have excited doubts in the minds of honest inquirers after truth.

There have been many attempts to reconcile these apparent contradictions. Some accept one class of passages, and hold the others so far in abeyance that their practical force is evaded. Persons of a naturally benevolent disposition dwell upon the Divine love and mercy to the almost total exclusion of the sterner attributes of the Lord's character. On the other hand, those of a cold, hard, and vindictive nature regard with more interest those passages in the Word which represent the Lord



as the embodiment of a revengeful and an inexorable Justice, hurling the thunderbolts of His wrath upon the heads of sinners, and visiting the disobedient with penal vengeance. Others affirm that both views of the Divine character must be true, though it is impossible for man to reconcile them, and they regard both statements as of equal authority. Some again say that it must be confessed that the Lord is angry, but that His anger is not like man's,—that it is just and holy, and is therefore incompatible with infinite love and mercy. But His anger is represented in the Word as “hot,” “fierce,” “cruel,” “unmerciful.” “He pours it out upon man,” He “hates,” “mocks,” “despises,” and is “cruel.” He “sets His face against man for evil,” “shuts His ears against their cries for mercy,” and “consumes them in the fiery breath of His indignation.”

How does such anger differ from man's? Is it not as fierce, cruel, and implacable? What elements are there in it to enoble its nature or mitigate its terrible effects? None whatever. These qualities have nothing in common with love and mercy. Can pure, disinterested, holy, tender, and infinitely perfect love be fierce, cruel, hard, revengeful, and implacable? Mercy is love exercised towards the undeserving. It is kindness to the unthankful and the evil; tenderness towards the spiritually blind, lame, and deaf. It involves compassion, pity, benevolence for the undeserving and guilty. Hatred and revenge, therefore, cannot exist in the same nature with these qualities, for they are as opposite to them as heat to cold, or light to darkness.

Nor is it possible that these opposite affections alternate in the Divine mind. The Lord loved men “while they were yet sinners,” and yet it is said that “He is angry with the wicked every day.” If both these passages are true in the same sense, the Lord must always be exercising at the same time two classes of affections which are exact opposites, and totally incompatible with each other.

He must be loving and hating, blessing and cursing the same

beings at the same time. His own mind must be a “Kingdom divided against itself,” which, by His own declaration, “cannot stand.” We are forced to the conclusion, therefore, that this representation of the Divine character is not correct, and that there must be some way of reconciling these apparent contradictions of the Sacred Scriptures in such a way as to perfectly harmonize them, to satisfy the reason, and save the Word from ambiguity. The subject, as all can see, is a most important one, and I invite attention to the manner in which the doctrines of the New Church solve its difficulties.

These doctrines take the ground that both representations of the Divine character are true in a certain sense, but not in the same sense. There are various kinds and degrees of truth. There are apparent truths and real truths, or relative and absolute truths. Thus it is a *genuine* and *absolute* truth that the Lord is a being of love and mercy, and infinitely perfect, and that He cannot hate, revenge, and punish. It is an *apparent* truth that He is angry and revengeful. The distinction between absolute and relative truth is one of the greatest importance to a rational knowledge of any subject, natural or spiritual. The difference is not the same as that which exists between the true and false; it is rather that between different degrees of truth. A higher degree of truth never appears true to a lower one. For example, science is not true for the senses. It is true for the eye that the sun rises and sets, and that the stars are brilliant points of light in the firmament. It is true for the eye that the sun does not shine in the night, and, for the sense of feeling, that he does not give forth as much heat in winter as in summer, nor can science change these appearances; the universe looked the same to Newton as it does to the savage. The senses were not designed to apprehend science; they are for the material world, and are to be used as instruments by the scientific mind to acquire the materials for higher truths. The appearances of things are just as true for the senses as are their actual forms and relations for the highest reason. We could not live



in this world without these material ideas, and no progress in scientific or spiritual truth will ever annul them.

Let us apply this principle to the interpretation of the Word, and see what help we can get from it in reconciling its apparent contradictions. All the changes which are attributed to the Lord in the Word are true as they appear to us, and as they affect us, when we regard ourselves as fixed and immovable centres, and the point of observation, and the standard of measurement. The Lord is full of hatred and revenge; that is the form in which His love comes to us, though it is not the form in which it left Him. The change has been made by us. He is jealous of His honor, and quick and terrible to punish any opposition to His will. Though omniscient, He makes inquiries and learns the true condition of men. He hears, and is deaf; He sees, and is blind; infinitely wise, He forms plans and is disappointed in the results; is immutable, and yet repents and changes the methods of His operations. In all these cases and similar ones, He is spoken of according to appearances caused by changes of state in us. The absolute truth is, that the Lord never changes. "He is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever." Both statements are true, only one is relatively, the other absolutely so. Our own experience is full of illustrations of this principle. When the eye is sound, the light is pleasant to it. The outward universe is photographed upon its delicate canvas in all its varied beauties of form and color; the soul is flooded with light, and rejoices in the beautiful panorama perpetually passing before it. But when the eye is diseased, the light becomes as the torment of fire to it. Its beams pierce and inflame it like so many poisoned arrows. *Now* it is true that the sun inflames and torments the eye—that it is angry and hot against it. But there has been no change in the nature of light. The sun's rays are as pure, and soft, and gentle as ever; the change is in the eye. *Now* the eye "loves darkness rather than light, because its deeds are evil"—because it has come into a state in which it cannot receive the light of the sun without pain. Carrying

out the manner of speaking, we may say that the sun sends darkness into the body; the light blinds us.

So the Lord is said to send out the light of His Divine truth to lead and instruct His people in the way of life; and again He is said to blind their eyes. Both expressions are true, and it is also true that the Lord is the true light, and that He never changes; the change is in man. The expression of the Lord's relation to man varies with man's changing states.

When the body is diseased, the most delicious and wholesome food becomes insipid, repulsive, and fills it with pain. It hurts, and sometimes would kill us as certainly as the most deadly poison. Its whole nature seems to have changed, and in relation to us it *has* changed. It is true that it is insipid and hurtful; but the changed effect is due to the change in us. The food is as wholesome and sweet as ever.

So, when we are in good moral and spiritual health, the Divine precepts are sweet and savory to us. We learn them and receive them into our life with delight, and they strengthen us. But when we are in evil and falsity they are distasteful, and they fill the soul with commotion and pain. When we live according to the commandments we are in the midst of the current of all the Divine forces, and in perfect harmony with them. Everything favors us. All spiritual and Divine influences lift us up, and bear us on towards the goal of perfection. Now we say the Lord favors us; that He is helpful, loving, wise, and good. That is the absolute truth as it exists in the Lord, and as it then appears to us, because we are in the order and harmonies of the same truth.

But suppose we reverse our course. We seek ends in opposition to the Divine ends and move against the current of the Divine forces, and contrary to the Divine order. All the Divine forces thwart and smite us. We think the Lord is our enemy; that He hates us, is angry with us; and as the mighty currents of His Divine Providence beat against us, and surge over us, they appear to us as anger, hatred, revenge, and fiery punishment.

Viewed from our stand-point it is so. When we look to ourselves as beings of this world only, when we regard worldly possessions as the only real wealth, and the gratification of our own selfish desires as the only good, we must conclude that every being or thing opposing the attainment of our end is hostile and injurious to us. We cannot come to any other conclusion. And it is true from our point of view. But viewed from the Lord it is directly the reverse. There are no feelings of hatred and wrath in His mind against us; He has not changed in the least. The currents of the Divine forces move on in the same eternal order. We are rowing against the stream, the stream has not changed *its* course. The Lord is not opposing us. He is moving on to the accomplishment of His infinite purposes of mercy according to the plans of infinite wisdom. The Lord cannot reverse His order, for that would be the destruction of all things. If we choose to oppose it, we ought not to accuse the Lord of opposing us, as though we had originated everything, and the whole course of the universe must bend to us; we ought to confess that we are opposing Him. If we regard the subject from a spiritual point of view, we shall see that the Lord is really favoring us as spiritual beings while He opposes us as natural and evil beings. As the ends we are pursuing while in evil must inevitably lead us to destruction, the Lord cannot manifest His love to us in any other way than by opposing us. To let us alone would be indifference to our happiness; it would be neglect and abandonment. To favor us would be siding with our low, natural desires, violating the order of His own infinite wisdom, and, to the extent of this influence, helping us on to the destruction of our spiritual being. The Lord cannot, therefore, manifest His love to us in any other way than by opposing us so long as we identify ourselves with the lowest plan of our being. He does oppose the evil and false in us, but He favors the good and true. The moment we regard ourselves as spiritual beings, as born to dwell forever in a spiritual world, as beings whose real interests are all spiritual,

we can see that the Lord can only favor us by opposing all that hinders the formation of a truly spiritual character in us.

But we may find the most clear and forcible illustration of this principle in natural death. So long as we regard our life in this world as the only real life, as most persons practically do, it is impossible not to look upon the death of the body as the end of life. We regard it as our greatest misery and shrink from it with horror. To our senses, and to our natural relations, it is the end of life; our friends leave us and we see them no more in the flesh forever. The tenderest and most intimate ties are severed. Our children and loved ones are torn from our arms and hearts. They are cut off in the bloom of youth and the prime of life from all the light and beauty and happiness of the world, and are consigned to the silence and darkness of the grave. To the senses, the dear ones are dead. That is the real and terrible truth. Our eye cannot see them. Our imploring cry cannot reach them. Our hand cannot grasp them. Yes, to our senses, to our material bodies, to all that relates to this world alone, they are not, they are dead. We mourn, we murmur, we wonder, if God loves us, and loves those whom He has taken from us, how He could so bereave us. He cannot love us, He must be angry with us or He could not so afflict us. That is what the senses and our merely natural affections say. They can say nothing else, for that is the truth, to them. And so where death is threatened, as a penalty for disobedience to the Divine commandments and when it is actually inflicted as a punishment, and when the Lord is represented as destroying and consuming the children of men in His wrath, such is the truth when viewed from this life alone.

But if we regard the same event from the Lord, or from man as a spiritual being, we shall come to very different conclusions. The form which alone the senses could recognize was not the real person. The material eye never saw, it was the light of the soul that shone in it. The material ear never heard, it was only the instrument upon which the air played

and whose vibrations the spiritual ear perceived. The hand and foot had no power of their own to feel or move. The material body could not love or know. It was only the material veil that clothed the one we loved, the rough husk that held within its folds the finer and more beautiful organization of the spiritual body. The Lord never intended that the spiritual body should remain forever covered with the coarse and dead garment of clay. As the blossom bursts the rough calyx; as the husk withers and perishes by an orderly process when the fruit is formed, so the material body falls from the spiritual, the veil is removed from the senses, and man is introduced into his home in the spiritual world.

Thus, the friend with whom we have held sweet converse, or the child of our affections, is not dead. The loved ones have risen out of the grave of the body into a higher and more real life. They have not gone into the cold realms of silence and darkness, but into a world of clearer light and intenser life. They have not gone from us, for we, too, are spiritual beings. They have come nearer to our real selves. They touch us on the spiritual side of our being: they breathe into our hearts the breath of a more heavenly life; and when the veil is taken away from us, and we are released from the imprisonment of the flesh, we shall again see them, radiant with a heavenly beauty, we shall again take them by the hand, or clasp them to our hearts, and so far as we are united to them by spiritual affections, we shall dwell with them in a real and far more perfect world than this, in a life free from the burdens, and limitations and sorrows of the material body. Viewed from this point, therefore, the whole aspect is changed. The death of the body is a freer and higher life of the soul. Departure from this world is entrance into a better. Vanishing from the material senses is coming into clear and open consciousness of the spiritual senses. The loss of our earthly home is entrance into the mansions prepared for us in our Father's house. Thus there is no loss on our part, no wrath, no vengeance on the part

of the Lord. In His infinite love and wisdom He has provided for this very step in life that He may bring us nearer to Himself.

Now, in all these examples I have adduced, both views are true in a certain sense, though they are directly opposite to each other. The absolute, unchanging, eternal truth is that the Lord is a being of infinite love and wisdom, that He always acts from the tenderest regard to our real good. He is never angry. He cannot hate. He cannot punish. He is actuated by the same motives in opposing our evil desires and false principles, that He is in communicating the richest heavenly blessings. But it is a relative truth, that the Lord opposes and punishes us, and so long as we have no other idea of good, or happiness than the gratification of our selfish and worldly desires, we cannot come to any other conclusion than that the Lord is angry with us and hates us. Both representations are therefore true, the one absolutely and universally, the other relatively and specifically in its application to us. Now, the Sacred Scriptures are written more in accordance with the truth as it *appears* to men in their fallen state than according to the absolute truth. The genuine truth does, indeed crop out in many places in clear expression, but it is generally veiled with appearance, or written according as the subjects of which they treat appear to men. The question naturally arises, why did not the Lord reveal to man the real truth alone, and not confuse him by diverse and apparently contradictory representations of His character and relation to us? Why did He not say, "I am love, mercy and goodness itself; I am never angry, I never punish, I look upon all beings with infinite complacency?" I answer, first, because that would not have been the whole truth, though it is the absolute truth. That would have been only a partial statement of it as it is when viewed from the Lord and heaven. If, therefore, the Lord had stated only the absolute truth in the Bible, He would have revealed only a part of it—the higher forms of it. It would not have been a complete

revelation of Himself. Second: If He had restricted the statements of spiritual truth to these higher and absolute forms, He would have failed to communicate it. In the transmission of truth from one mind to another, two conditions always modify and determine the result—the ability to express, and the ability to receive it. The Lord has all wisdom and power to express the truth, but what any given mind can receive will depend on its capacity. The wisest philosopher can communicate no more truth to the infant than the unlettered nurse. It is only slowly and little by little, that the child begins to discover that all things are not what they seem. The whole process of education consists in leading the mind from appearances to realities. Our personal experience testifies to this fact. The history of nations confirms the same truth. The progress of humanity up the slow ascent of the ages, has been from the truths of the senses to those of the intellect. The Lord is always in the effort to communicate the highest truth and the best good to His children they can receive. But again. If the Lord had expressed the absolute truth in His Word, it would not have been true for the men to whom it was given. They were spiritually blind and deaf. They could not have been made to see spiritual truth. A revelation must, therefore, be made in such a form that man could apprehend it in some sense, even a low one, or not at all. If He had not given any revelation He would have left man to go down in darkness to certain destruction. But that His infinite love would not permit, and it therefore provided one adapted to all states. It embodies the truth on all sides. It is true for the senses, it is true for men, and angels, and the Lord. It rises as we rise. The letter is true for the letter of our nature—the sensuous mind. The spirit is true for us as spiritual beings. As the material world is true for the senses and for the scientific intellect, so the Bible is true to the evil, to the ignorant natural mind, which mistakes the shadow for substance, and also to the spiritual mind and the purest reason. As man rises in his apprehensions of truth, the Bible rises from the

letter to the spirit—from earth to heaven, from man to the Lord, and from the medium of conjunction between them. Its truths came from God, and they express His wisdom. They are infinite, and no finite mind can exhaust them, though the little child can know something of them. The Word of God can know no contradictions. What seem so are only different views of the same subject. The men who try to discredit its authenticity as an inspired Book, because it does not always say the same things concerning the same subject, whether the point of view is from the Lord or man, from the spirit or matter, are as inconsistent and absurd as he would be who should deny that the material universe was harmonious because we sometimes speak of its phenomena and motions from the point of view of the senses, and sometimes from that of science.

If the Bible is the Word of God, as it claims to be, and contains a revelation of Divine truth through the instrumentality of material forms and conditions, we must expect it to be different from any other book, and we have no reason to hope that we can understand it fully unless we view it from all sides, from spirit as well as matter, and know how to distinguish the truth of the senses from the truth of the spirit, not mistaking the one for the other. When the distinction between relative and absolute truth is understood, the passages which give us the subject of our discourse, though directly opposite in the letter, will be found in perfect accord in the spirit. Grace and fury, compassion and revenge, mercy and wrath are the same attributes regarded from different points of view; and when seen from the central truth, the storms of wrath and fury melt into the clear heavens, and the glory of the Divine truth, and the goodness of the Divine love, and the infinite tenderness of the Lord's mercy, brood over all.

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